

CLAIMS

1. A method for avoiding vehicular collisions, comprising:

 monitoring a control of a vehicle, the control normally being regularly
adjusted by the operator such that the time between adjustments is sufficiently less than the
time needed to inhibit a collision after it is no longer controlled by the operator; and

 activating a first alarm if the control is not adjusted in a sufficient amount of
time from a preceding adjustment.
2. The method of claim 1 further comprising sounding a second alarm if the control
continues to not be adjusted for a second sufficient amount of time.
3. The method of claim 2 wherein the first alarm is provided to the operator of the
vehicle.
4. The method of claim 3, further comprising disabling the first alarm and continuing
to monitor the control in response to a signal from the operator.
5. The method of claim 4, wherein the second alarm is provided externally to the
vehicle operator to allow the vehicle to be disabled by an entity other than the operator.
6. The method of claim 5, wherein the first alarm is provided in the pilot house of a
tug.
7. The method of claim 6, wherein the monitored control is a mechanism for moving
a rudder of the tug.
8. A collision avoidance system, comprising:

 a sensor for monitoring a vehicle control, the sensor providing a signal
indicative of whether the control is adjusted;

a first timer connected to said sensor to receive the provided signal, the timer activating a first alarm if from the provided signal it determines that an excessive amount of time elapses without the control being adjusted.

9. The system of claim 8, wherein the sensor monitors a steering element of the vehicle.

10. The system of claim 9, wherein the vehicle is a tug, and the sensor is mounted to directly or indirectly monitor movement of a tug rudder.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein the sensor comprises a slotted disk mounted about a steering column and an Optical switch operably positioned about the disk to generate a signal when the disk is rotated indicating that the steering column is being adjusted.

12. The system of claim 8, further comprising a second timer connected to the first timer, the second timer being activated in response to the first timer determining that an excessive amount of time elapsed without the control being adjusted, the second timer activating a second alarm if a preset amount of time elapses before the second timer is deactivated.

13. The system of claim 12, further comprising a docking switch connected to the first timer to disable said first timer upon activation by a user, the first timer remaining deactivated until the control is once again adjusted.

14. A collision avoidance system for a tug having a rudder and a steering system to control the rudder, comprising:

a sensor communicatively linked to the steering system for monitoring adjustment of the rudder, the sensor generating a signal indicative of whether the rudder is adjusted;

a first timer connected to said sensor to receive the generated signal, the first timer activating a first alarm if from the signal it is determined that a first preset amount of time elapses without the rudder being adjusted.

15. The system of claim 14, wherein the sensor comprises a slotted disk mounted about a steering column and an optical switch operably positioned about the disk to generate a signal when the disk is rotated indicating that the steering column is being adjusted.

16. The system of claim 14, wherein the sensor comprises a circuit integrated with a hydraulically actuated rudder control system.

17. The system of claim 14, further comprising a second timer connected to the first timer, the second timer being activated in response to the first timer determining that an excessive amount of time elapsed without the rudder being adjusted, the second timer activating a second alarm if a second preset amount of time elapses before the second timer is deactivated.

18. The system of claim 17, further comprising a docking switch connected to the first timer to disable said first timer upon activation by a user, the first timer remaining deactivated until the rudder is once again adjusted.

19. The system of claim 14, wherein the first alarm comprises a device for notifying an operator of the tug that an alarm condition exists, said first alarm device being mounted in a wheel house of the tug.

20. The system of claim 19, further comprising a second alarm mounted outside of the wheel house to notify crew members that an alarm condition exists if the first alarm is not deactivated within a preset amount of time.